



Focus

Cross-Cascade Pipeline

Ecology calls for greater water quality protection, accepts air quality agreement

Ecology contributes to the state review process

Olympic Pipe Line Company has proposed to build a 231-mile pipeline that would stretch from Woodinville in King County to Pasco, crossing 78 wetland areas and nearly 300 rivers and streams along the way. Up to 4.6 million gallons of petroleum products would be shipped daily.

Authority for state environmental decisions on the project rests with the Energy Facility Site Evaluation Council (EFSEC), which by law must consider energy projects while balancing environmental protection, safety, and state's need for energy supplies.

The Washington State Department of Ecology (Ecology) does not have decision-making authority over the pipeline proposal, but joins local governments and other state agencies to provide comments to EFSEC. Ecology and the others have commented on Olympic's project application and Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) and will file testimony with EFSEC in February 1999. EFSEC is scheduled to hold a public hearing in summer 1999 before making a recommendation to the governor, who will make the final decision on the project.

Concerns about the Draft Environmental Impact Statement

Ecology has not taken an overall position on project. However, in comments on the project's Draft Environmental Impact Statement submitted on Dec. 17, 1998, Ecology expressed concerns about some portions of the project, as currently proposed, and about the adequacy of the existing environmental impact statement. Ecology suggests that more-thorough environmental review of the project would allow the company to correct some of the environmental problems found in the current proposal. Those problems include:

Threat to salmon habitat

Ecology believes that the project, as currently defined and proposed, would present a new threat to salmon and their habitat at a time when salmon and steelhead are already proposed for listing under the Endangered Species Act. Alternative routes and stream-crossing methods, pipeline leak detection and response, and other operational practices that could reduce or eliminate harm to fish need to be analyzed and incorporated into the project description and the DEIS.

For example, the proposed route through the Snoqualmie Valley crosses some of the most significant salmon streams in the valley, including People's Creek, North Fork Cherry Creek (crossed twice), main stem Cherry Creek, Harris Creek, Tolt River, Griffin Creek, and Tokul Creek. Ecology suggested three alternative routes that would avoid environmental damage to these salmon streams caused by construction of the pipeline and potential spills once the pipeline is in operation. No such alternatives were considered in the DEIS.

Effects on ground water, surface water and soils from pipeline spills

Pipelines are susceptible to leaks and ruptures. In addition to environmental threats at stream crossings, Ecology estimates that the proposed pipeline would create greater environmental risk on about 100 miles of land with sensitive groundwater resources. If the project is built and operated as proposed, the leak detection system and response time would not be adequate to prevent spills that would cause significant and unavoidable harm to the environment.

In-depth analysis of state-of-the-art spill prevention, detection and response capabilities is needed in the DEIS, but is not present. For example, the DEIS discusses the use of "block valves" at various points on the pipeline as a method of isolating a spill to a particular segment of the line. However, there is no discussion of using block valves at stream crossings to minimize direct spills to rivers and streams.

An adequate Draft Environmental Impact Statement is needed

In addition to the specific concerns mentioned above, Ecology believes that the DEIS is inadequate overall because it considers only the pipeline route preferred by Olympic. It provides no analysis of alternative routes, and inadequately analyzes the effects of the one route that is considered. Ecology recommends that Olympic and the lead government agencies develop a second DEIS that supplies missing information needed to accurately determine whether the pipeline can be built and operated in an environmentally sound manner.

DEIS should be part of EFSEC's decision-making process

Ecology also questions whether the Environmental Impact Statement will be used by EFSEC to make a recommendation on the project. Ecology has been informed that the EIS will not be part of the record for the EFSEC hearing unless entered into evidence by an outside party. An EIS, when it is part of the decision-making process, provides for improving on a project based on comments from the public and government agencies that have environmental expertise.

Agreement developed to address air quality concerns

Ecology and Olympic Pipe Line Company have resolved concerns about the proposed pipeline's effects on air quality. This agreement will be presented to EFSEC at a hearing in early 1999 and, if accepted, will require specific measures to prevent or limit air emissions. Additional air emission controls will likely be developed through the permitting process.

Among other things, Olympic agrees to control air polluting emissions from the loading facility at the pipeline's terminal in Kittitas by using a vapor control system with an efficiency of 99.9 percent or greater. If odor from the Kittitas Terminal is detected beyond the terminal boundary, Olympic will report and correct the problem. During construction, dust must be strictly controlled, and loads of sand, soil, gravel or rock will be covered by tarp when trucks are travelling on public roads. Open burning of vegetation or any other material associated with constructing or operating the project will be prohibited.

For more information:

Ecology's comments on the DEIS are available at: <http://www.wa.gov/ecology/sea/opl>

General information about the pipeline project is available at: <http://www.efsec.wa.gov/pipe.html>

For more information or printed copies, contact Brenden McFarland, (360) 407-6913

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